DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 727 CS 214 022

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TITLE Mary Miles Bibb: Education and Moral Improvement in the "Voice of the Fugitive."
PUB DATE Aug 93
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (76th, Kansas City, MO, August 11-14, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black History; Educational Finance; Foreign Countries; *Journalism History; *Newspapers; *Role of Education; *Sex Role; Slavery
IDENTIFIERS Canada; Fugitive Slave Act 1850

ABSTRACT

An ardent antislavery supporter and teacher, Mary Elizabeth Miles Bibb (c.1820-1877) knew the significance of an education and the purpose it would serve, in the classroom and in the newsroom, in establishing a better life for blacks prior to the Civil War. In 1847, her antislavery involvement allowed her to meet her future husband, Henry Bibb, who became well known throughout the United States and Canada as a primary participant in the antislavery movement. The Bibbs joined thousands of blacks who escaped to Canada in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Mary solicited funds from American abolitionists to start a school, and Henry raised money to start a newspaper, the "Voice of the Fugitive," which appealed to fugitive slaves who found sanctuary in Canada. Education was a recurring topic in the "Voice," probably due to Mary's influence. Henry Bibb went on several extended antislavery lecture tours, leaving Mary to oversee all the operations of the newspaper. Mary used the guise of the editor to speak out on issues of moral elevation, religion, education, the influence of the church, slavery, and food and shelter for newly arrived fugitives. Financial trouble plagued the "Fugitive," and when the offices burned in October 1853, the paper suspended publication. Henry Bibb died in 1854, and Mary moved to Windsor, established another private school, and eventually married Isaac N. Cary, who shared her enthusiasm for moral and social causes. While given little credit for her activities on the "Voice," Mary Bibb Cary significantly influenced the role the newspaper played in shaping the lives of black society in the U.S. and Canada. Promoting education as vital to black freedom and well-being, she used her own education to speak out at a time when women were expected to remain silent and so opened doors for both women and blacks that might otherwise have remained closed. (Eighty-one notes are included.) (RS)

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MARY MILES BIBB: EDUCATION AND MORAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE *VOICE OF THE FUGITIVE*

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Presented at the 1993 AEJMC national convention,
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(Aug. 11-14, 1993)

CS214022

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MARY MILES BIBB: EDUCATION AND MORAL IMPROVEMENT
IN THE *VOICE OF THE FUGITIVE*

Education served as a common denominator for all women journalists prior to the Civil War, functioning as the foundation for a vocation and as a tool for emancipation and equality. Mary Elizabeth Miles Bibb quickly learned the significance of an education and the purpose it would serve, in the classroom and in the newsroom, in establishing a better life for the black race.

Generally, the role of black women in the nineteenth century centered around the home and their families, with little opportunity to engage in activities outside the home. Teaching was one of the exceptions, allowing women to share their knowledge with children other than their own at a time when education played a key part in elevating the status of blacks. At the same time it allowed many women to acquire an education they would not have gained otherwise. The schoolroom, second only to the church, was a focal point of community activity for black women, and from their own educational experiences these women learned to deal with societal constraints and to make the most of their role as helpmate to the family and the community. For the less fortunate, work outside the home was limited to low-paying, domestic duties. Others were often encouraged by their parents to use the education they had acquired to become a teacher, which occupied a higher status for single women than domestic work.[1]

For Mary Miles Bibb, it offered the additional opportunity to take an active role in the civic concerns of the period. Teacher and activist Maria M. Stewart had argued that improved educational

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accomplishments among blacks would compel white society to re-evaluate its opinion of blacks and eventually to relinquish its prejudiced perspective.[2] As with Stewart, Sarah Mapps Douglass, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Mary used her education not only in her teaching duties, but also in helping to improve the condition and status of blacks in North America. However, as with many married women of the period, her accomplishments were either overshadowed by the achievements of her husband or attributed to his expertise and actions, rather than to her own. Mary would display her dedication to improving her race in the classroom, in the community, and in the operation of her husband's *Voice of the Fugitive*, rivalled only by Mary Ann Shadd Cary's *Provincial Freeman* as the top newspapers for black Canadians in the 1850s.

Education and literacy were valuable resources for blacks prior to the Civil War. However, deprivation of knowledge had been a key component of oppression for blacks, and wisdom and knowledge came to be associated with freedom for all blacks, slave and freeborn.[3] The need for "schooling" became a top priority for blacks, particularly for their children, but males were the primary recipients of higher education opportunities, despite the necessity for women to serve as teachers at the primary and secondary.education levels.

Young black women found it difficult to receive an advanced education in the United States, despite teaching being one of the few acceptable outside career choices for women. Many had been denied the benefits of an early education in black public schools, which made it difficult for them to qualify for admittance to normal schools for teacher training. Despite these obstacles, Mary easily qualified for advanced training. Born the only child of free Quaker parents in Rhode

Island about 1820, Mary probably received her early lessons at home, before eventually enrolling in a normal school. Because records were sketchy on the lives of women in the nineteenth century, focusing more on the men of the period, records fail to identify clearly what school Mary attended. Historians C. Peter Ripley and Afua Cooper contend that Mary enrolled in the Massachussetts State Normal School in Lexington.[4] However, in 1852, activist and journalist Martin R. Delany wrote that Mary, "in accordance with the established rules, graduated as a teacher, in the Normal School, at Albany, New York, several years ago."[5] She later taught in several schools, including schools in Albany, N.Y., and Cincinnati. Delany determined:

> Miss Miles (now Bibb) was a very talented young lady and successful teacher. She spent several years of usefulness in Massachusetts, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, after which she went to Cincinnati, as assistant-teacher in Gilmore's 'High School for Colored Children,' which ended her public position in life.[6]

The Cincinnati school, established by white philanthropist Hiram S. Gilmore, would have provided a much better teaching position for Mary. Gilmore spared no expense to make his school a success. He employed the best teachers, and "besides the common branches of an English course, Latin, Greek, music, and drawing were taught."[7] The school's reputation was excellent, and it was well-known for its ability to prepare students for an advanced education at Oberlin College or other schools of higher education that maintained an open admission policy for all students, regardless of race. Mary's move to Cincinnati from Albany would have been an opportunity for advancement in her teaching career.

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However, it was not her teaching, but her antislavery involvement that allowed her to meet her future husband, Henry Bibb, in 1847. In addition to her teaching skills, Mary had also acquired a reputation as an avid antislavery supporter.[8] While no documentation exists to confirm Mary's involvement or participation in antislavery activities prior to her marriage to Henry, her teaching positions in Boston and Philadelphia took place during a time of immense activity among women's group not only in the struggle to take control of black education, but also for desegregation in the school systems and in public transportation. In each cause, Boston and Philadelphia were divided into specific neighborhoods, and individuals or groups of women were assigned special areas in which to obtain signatures on petitions to be sent to Congress.[9] These activities were conducted by middle-class black women such as Mary would have been at the time.

While Mary's abolitionist activities remain obscure, Henry Bibb became well-known throughout the United States and Canada as a primary participant in the antislavery movement. Bibb had been born in Kentucky to a slave mother and a white master. He escaped more than five times, only to be recaptured--including one failed attempt to free his first wife and daughter. He successfully escaped from a Texas master in 1842 and fled to Detroit, where he received aid from antislavery leaders. Eventually despairing of ever reuniting with his wife and daughter, Bibb wrote that he "resolved, in 1846, to spend my days in traveling, to advance the anti-slavery cause."[10] He journeyed throughout the country, lecturing about his experiences as a slave and supporting the call for emancipation. During his travels in May 1847, he attended an antislavery anniversary celebration in New York, where he was introduced

to Mary, "a lady whom I had frequently heard very highly spoken of, for her activity and devotion to the anti-slavery cause, as well as her talents and learning, and benevolence in the cause of reforms generally."[11]

Bibb had discovered a kindred soul in Mary, who shared his principles of moral and social conduct. In his memoirs he wrote that "she possessed moral principle, and frankness of disposition, which is often sought for but seldom found."[12] Despite the mutual attraction, the couple agreed to wait one year before marrying, "that if either party should see any reason to change their mind within that time, the contract should not be considered binding."[13]

After the marriage, the two settled in Boston, where Mary taught school in what was probably her last teaching position in the United States. Boston was a stronghold of the antislavery movement, and the city should have provided Mary and Henry the opportunity to participate in their abolitionist work. Henry was employed as an antislavery lecturer, and he joined Joshua Leavitt's bibles-for-slaves campaign, gaining in prominence as an antislavery speaker, along with Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and J.W.C. Pennington.[14]

However, the Bibbs' prosperity in the United States was short-lived. Two years after their marriage, the Bibbs joined thousands of blacks who gathered their possessions and escaped to Canada in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. This law not only allowed slave masters to pursue and reclaim slaves who had sought refuge in the North, but it also permitted the kidnapping of free blacks and their subsequent sell into slavery. Slaveowners were only required to point a finger at a black individual and claim him or her as his own property. In

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addition, stipends paid to judges for determining free or slave status of an individual weighed heavily against blacks. Any judge or commissioner who determined a black to be a fugitive could claim a $10 fee, and he received a $5 fee for declaring that one was not a fugitive.[15] Bibb was a known fugitive, having published his memoirs the previous year, and he had also corresponded with a former master, expressing his dismay and other feelings about his treatment as a slave. His reputation and prominence throughout the country would make the task easier for slavehunters to find him. Canada provided a safe haven away from slavehunters and the chance for the Bibbs to contribute toward the elevation of their brethren, who were flocking to Canada in increasing numbers. Between 1850 and 1860 the black population in Canada increased from approximately 40,000 and 60,000.[16]

Upon arriving in Sandwich, Canada West, the Bibbs considered various methods of assisting the fugitives in settling into their new homeland. One way to help the fugitives was through education, and Mary was eager to start a school for the children. Immediately upon arriving in Canada West she made plans to open a school in her home, since no school for blacks existed in the area. Meanwhile, Henry actively campaigned to begin a newspaper designed for the benefit of the refugees. Realizing that black Canadians alone did not possess the funds to support either the paper's operation or the school, the Bibbs appealed to their abolitionist friends in the United States for financial contributions. Mary approached New York philanthropist Gerrit Smith for help with the paper, as well as her school. She wrote:

> Will you aid us by sending as many subscribers as convenience will permit, There are hundredrs [sic] of Slaves coming here daily. My husband & self consider this the field for us at present. He is about to engage in this. I expect to take a

> school next week--any aid from the friend will be very acceptable. Please let me know what you think of the movement.[17]

Henry turned to his friends at the American Missionary Association, an antislavery organization devoted to bringing Christianity and education to nonwhites throughout the continent. Like Mary, he asked for supplies and funds for her school and his newspaper. He implored:

> I think if your society would forwared a lot of Bibles and Testimants to this place, they would be very acceptable--and would be profitablly distributed among the fugitives. My wife has just commenced teaching a school in Sandwich, for them--she has quite a large school, but has not a suppy of school books for the children. . . . Soon after the law was passed fugitives were fleing to Canadan in such vast nombers that I was induced by the friends of humanity to come here and commence an organ through which their wants & conditions might be made known to our friends in the States, & which should be devoted to the elevation of the condition of our people genrally. I here inclose the prospectus, & I hope that you will inform me what you think of it.[18]

The errors in Henry's personal correspondence lend credence to the idea that Mary played a significant role in editing and writing for the *Voice of the Fugitive*. Henry had previously admitted that he received no formal education, as a result of his enslavement. He declared that "experience and observation have been my principal teachers," with the exception of three weeks of schooling "which I have had the good fortune to receive since my escape from the 'grave yard of the mind,' or the dark prison of human bondage."[19]

The eloquence of the words in Bibb's paper contrasted sharply with his personal correspondence, suggesting that Mary Bibb had a considerable amount of influence over what eventually appeared in the paper. Bibb acknowledged his shortcomings in the first issue of the *Voice of the Fugitive*. He declared:

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> To make a competent editor, we are not unmindful of the fact that there are several qualifications which are necessary. He must be a man of talent, a ready writer, with prudence and literary attainments, well seasoned with good common sense. But we do not claim for ourselves but a very limited degree of either; therefore, it is presuming necessity alone that has impelled us to the task.[20]

While the introduction emphasized an editorial "we," the front page of the *Voice*'s Jan. 1, 1851, inaugural issue proclaimed Henry Bibb as the sole editor and proprietor. However, it also included a list of agents and correspondents throughout Canada, the United States, and Europe. Mary Bibb's role in the paper's operation and production was not mentioned.

The front page also provided subscription rates and advertising fees. Subscribers were charged $1 per year, "always in advance," and no subscription would be accepted for less than six months. Advertising fees, rarely published in the black newspapers of the period, imposed a charge of $1 for four insertions of an ad of no more than 10 lines, requiring 25 cents for every subsequent insertion.

The prospectus for the *Voice*, which had also been sent to American abolitionists in an attempt to solicit interest and financial support, and the front-page "Introduction" in the first issue outlined Bibb's plans for the future of the paper. As the name implied, the *Voice* was intended to appeal to the massive numbers of fugitive slaves who had found sanctuary in Canada. The concerns the Bibbs promised to address included topics both Henry and Mary had advocated throughout much of their lives. Having been a slave, Henry took particular care in presenting his attitude toward emancipation and emigration to Canada. He wrote:

> We expect, by the aid of good Providence, to advocate the cause of human liberty in the true meaning of that form. We shall advocate the immediate and unconditional abolition of chattel slavery every where, but especially on the American soil. We shall also persuade, as far as it may be practiceable, every oppressed person of color in the United States to settle in Canada, where the laws make no distinction among men, based on complection, and upon whose soil 'no slave can breathe.'[21]

Bibb also reasoned that personal autonomy for the fugitives and strong religious philosophies was crucial to their survival as a race. The *Voice* introduction presented the ideas of moral principles, education, and employment as the primary means of self-reliance and personal independence. Bibb promised:

> We shall advocate the claims of the American slaves to the Bible, from whom it has ever been withheld. We shall advocate the cause of Temperance and moral reform generally. The cause of education shall have a prominent space in our columns. We shall advocate the claims of agricultural pursuits among our people, as being the most certain road to independence and self respect.[22]

Articles appearing in the inaugural issue of the paper addressed aid for fugitive slaves, temperance, and the need for schools specifically directed toward the education of blacks in Canada.

Education was a recurring topic in the *Voice*, probably due to Mary's influence. While an item titled "Education" printed Jan. 15 was unsigned, the writing style, as well as the sentiment, bears a striking resemblance to one designated as "Schools," signed by "M.E. Bibb" and published in the Feb. 26 issue. In "Education," blacks were praised for enduring the burdens of slavery and warned of the evils that arise when education or any type of mental instruction is denied. Blacks were encouraged to strive for the power of education to lift them above degradation. The article stated:

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> With the mass of degradation before us, we say that the most effectual remedy for the above evils is education. It is the best fortune that a father can give his son; it is a treasure that can never be squandered, and one that will always command respect and secure a good livelihood for an industrious person.[23]

Similarly, Mary's "Schools" stressed the importance of struggling to survive, pointing out as real heroes those individuals who had spent years enslaved before they could implement an escape, only to have to flee into Canada to avoid recapture. According to Mary, those individuals were the ones who deserved to improve their condition through education. She asserted:

> Are such persons worthy? Is it not doing good to help such to possess so great a treasure as education? The friends in the States would render these people a great good by turning their attention more to schools.[24]

Having received an advanced education before embarking on her teaching career, Mary was extremely critical of those teachers who possessed only the rudiments of an education and who might be ill-equipped to handle the obstacles of low funds, few supplies, and poor working conditions, which were common occurrences among schools for blacks. She feared that anyone who failed to possess these qualifications would be almost useless for assisting blacks in achieving societal acceptance. She pointed out:

> To do anything the teachers should be such as know what material they have to operate upon; and, knowing this, they should have something wherewith to work -- the sympathy of friends and an assurance of being sustained -- otherwise there cannot be good schools in Canada.[25]

The last statement was a plea for help from supporters in the United States for her day-school. She had opened a small school in her home, but increased enrollment during the first year forced her to relocate into a nearby schoolroom.[26] Mary complained of the "embarrassing

circumstances under which it started, namely, a dark ill-ventilated room, uncomfortable seats, want of desks, books and all sorts of school apparatus."[27] The enrollment had jumped from 25 to 46 students within the first month of operation. In addition, she was forced to carry firewood from a long distance away, just to heat the classroom. For her efforts as teacher and school caretaker, she received $10 for the eight-month school term.[28] Despite the hardships, Mary performed an invaluable service for the refugee community, considering that educational opportunities for black children in Canada West were meager. Legal provisions required that blacks attend segregated schools. However, the schools lacked funding, and often no schools existed in areas with large black populations. Mary's struggles to keep her school open were personally rewarding, if not financially so.

Mary's interest in education would soon become secondary to Henry's responsibilities of lecturing against slavery. The two had worked almost as a team since their marriage and subsequent arrival in Canada, sharing the duties of establishing their separate careers, including finding financial and moral supporters. However, it was not long before he embarked on an antislavery lecture tour of the northern United States, part of his mission to assist in the abolition of slavery, and she was left to operate the *Voice*, as well as her private school. He had spent too many months away from his beloved cause of freedom, and he was eager to return to the fight. A July 30 editorial letter from Henry, detailing his travels in Illinois in July, indicated that he had been away for quite some time and that he was expected to be away from the paper for several more weeks. One stop had been Chicago during Fourth of July celebrations, where he condemned the "rumsucking,

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toast-drinking, bell-tolling, cannonading, powder-wasting, and speech-making, in mockery of that declaration of liberty, in which our fathers declared to the whole world, that 'all men were created equal.'"[29]

During his absence, Mary exercised her opportunity to provide the editorial voice for the paper, using the guise of editor to speak out when women were usually expected to remain silent in public. Societal rules required that "ladies" maintain a certain decorum in their public conduct. To thrust herself into the public eye would automatically label any woman activist as something less than a lady. Maria Stewart had already observed the harshness of society's resistance to outspoken women, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary would soon learn the cost of speaking out. However, Mary was a vocal individual who believed in assuming an active role in all her endeavors--from promoting education and self-help to supervising the Refugee Home Society, an organization that would increase the Bibbs' notoriety in both positive and negative ways. In operating the paper, Mary took advantage of her anonymity, probably confident that readers either would not realize her presence as the editor or accept her role as a representative of her husband. Whatever the reason for her uncharacteristic fervor, her impassioned pleas were very similar to those of her husband.

Religion and the influence of the church featured prominently during Mary's time as acting editor. In one issue, she berated the Episcopal Convention of Pennsylvania for refusing to receive delegates from the Church of Crucifixion, a predominantly black church, although the delegates to the convention were white. She avowed:

> All such religion is sport for the devils. We believe that there is more social equality, more union and sympathy between white and colored persons in the worst "doggeries" that can be found than there is in such churches; for there

they do eat, drink and get drunk together on terms of equality.[30]

Like Henry, Mary emphasized the necessity of maintaining a strong moral character and Christian virtues. Previous articles in the *Voice* warned readers, particularly men, to avoid the temptation of sin at all costs. The Bibbs declared that a man will never regret remaining free from temptation, and by doing so, until the "close of his life he expresses his joy that he was saved from the path of shame, by giving a decided negative, when the voice of pleasure beckoned him on."[31] Another printed item listed the number of slaves owned by various religious sects, ranging from Methodists with 219,563 to Catholics with none.[32]

In her role as editor Mary also lashed out against *The American Baptist*, which described the actions of a group of American philanthropists to acquire land and schools for refugees to Canada as a means of keeping the former slaves "in a state of *pupilage and dependence for years to come*."[33] The Bibbs viewed city life as a subversive influence on blacks, and rural life offered a chance for a respectable existence. According to this philosophy, cities and villages precluded any opportunities for moral, intellectual, or pecuniary improvement for black children--who are "taught as a general thing to aspire no higher than to be boot blacks, wash-women, wood-sawers, and table waiters."[34] The plan, supported by the Bibbs, called for the purchase of 20,000 acres of land with donated funds, and the land was eventually to be sold to fugitives at cost, with certain stipulations, including the conditions that the land be used to promote "education, morality, and industrial habits."[35] Mary pointed out that

the editor of the *Baptist* did not have "a perfect knowledge of the plan or the men who have undertaken to do what they can for its accomplishment." She concluded that the *Baptist*'s report was incorrect, and "as for the imputations which the writer has attempted to cast upon us, we consider them unworthy of notice."[36]

In the same issue Mary included an open letter directed to Henry Clay of Kentucky about his emigration plan. She rebuked Clay's proposal, which called for transporting free blacks to Liberia for colonization, and she defended a plan to provide free land for blacks to colonize in Canada. The Bibbs would remain staunch supporters of emigration to Canada as the only alternative to a racist existence in the United States, and the issue would become a recurring theme throughout the paper's operation. Mary, as did Henry, saw little value or practicality in transporting blacks to Liberia to set up their own society. She listed numerous advantages of a Canadian colonization proposal over a Liberian colony, including: moral, social, and educational opportunities; cheaper transportation to the country; sanctity of the family unit; and unity of freeborn blacks and ex-slaves.[37] Blacks traveling to Liberia would have to build a black society without the advantages of an established church or interactive community. It would also cost less to transport blacks across the border into Canada than to ship them across the ocean to a foreign country, with ship passage charges forcing many blacks to leave their family behind and make the journey alone. Upon arriving, they would surely discover the natives of Liberia to be less than hospitably, probably even hostile, toward the newcomers, who were nothing more than

strangers and outsiders.[38] By comparison, she reasoned, Canada would welcome the fugitives with open arms.

With the large numbers of ex-slaves arriving daily into Canada, Mary often addressed issues of food, shelter, and clothing for the fugitives. "Aid for the Needy" acknowledged the generosity of a ladies' society in Whitestown, N.J., which had shipped two barrels of clothing and three dollars to pay shipping costs to the Bibbs to be distributed among the fugitives. Appearing in the column next to the donation item, "Keep It Before the Refugees' Friends" implored benefactors to assist in purchasing land in Canada at $2 to $4 an acre to be used to settle fugitives from slavery.[39]

On the issue of slavery itself, Mary was as outspoken as her husband. In one article she warned black men in the North, East, and West not to procrastinate "until the cords of prejudice and slavery have bound us all 'hand and foot.'" She issued a call for a convention to be held in Toronto, Canada West, during September or October to "take counsel together and devise means for our moral and intellectual advancement."[40]

Intellectual advancement included moral and economic achievements of all members of the black race, and Mary displayed a strong interest in items directed particularly toward women and children. One article, "Home and Women," reappeared in subsequent issues. Taken from the *Christian Inquirer*, the article extolled the virtues of womanhood and home life as the cornerstones of religion, government, and society. The article stated:

> Oh, spare our homes! The love we experience there gives us our faith in an Infinite goodness -- the purity and disinterested tenderness of home are our foretaste and our

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> earnest of a better world. In the relations there established and fostered do we find through life the chief solace and joy of existence.[41]

A similar article pointed out the strength and value of children's confidence in their parents. The writer narrated the tale of a 12-year-old boy who wanted to die rather than to admit than his father had been guilty of murder. The writer concluded:

> I have often wondered why it is that parents and guardians do not more frequently and more cordially reciprocate the confidence of their children. How hard it is to children. How hard it is to convince a child that his father or mother can do wrong! Our little people are always our sturdiest defenders. They are loyal to the maxim "the king can do no wrong," and all the monarchs they know are their parents.[42]

In addition to the changes Mary sought to achieve in the members of Canada West's black community, Mary also made changes in the news content of the *Voice*, adding news briefs and crime news. One item, taken from the *Boston Commonwealth*, provided a detailed description of a murder and attempted suicide in Lynn.[43] Another item described the attempted destruction of a passenger train in Detroit by conspirators feuding with the Michigan Central Railroad. The box containing the explosives was accidentally transferred from the train to the depot, where one traveler was injured after sitting on the box moments before the explosion.[44]

Perhaps the toil of operating the paper almost singlehandedly, as well as conducting her private school, was more strenuous than she had imagined. Mary was stricken with an unknown illness, probably brought on by fatigue. Upon his return to Canada West, Henry penned an editorial that not only summarized his trip to Illinois and Wisconsin, but it also mentioned Mary's bout of sickness. He explained:

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> We have just returned from Wisconsin and Illinois, where we have spent several weeks in laboring for the advancement of our cause, and where we should have remained a longer time had it been consistent with the health of our family. Mrs. Bibb, who has been engaged for several months in teaching a school for the refugees' children, in Sandwich, Canada West, kindly undertook the supervision of our business in connection with her School during our absence, which was more than she could accomplish, and was doubtless one cause of her illness. She was, for several days after our arrival, confined to her bed with scorching fever, which is broken, thank Heaven! and she is now convalescent.[45]

However, Henry allowed Mary only a few days to convalesce before he embarked on another lecture tour. The *Voice*'s Aug. 27 issue included notification of the "Absence of the Editor." The notice read:

> Before this goes to press, we shall have taken our departure for the East, to be absent for several weeks. We shall take an exploring tour through Canada, for general information, and for the interest of our cause; we shall also visit New York, and Ohio, before we return.[46]

He also advised readers to address all letters and correspondence intended for him to the paper's address at Sandwich, Canada West, "where they will receive attention."[47] Mary was again left to oversee the operation of the paper, as well as deal with Henry's correspondence, in addition to supervising her school and Sunday school. An itinerary printed directly below the notice indicated that by the time the paper was printed Henry had already appeared as a guest speaker at the Elgin Settlement on Monday and Chatham on Tuesday, leaving Mary to publish the Aug. 27 issue alone.

The editorial content of the papers Mary published often mirrored the contents of those directed by Henry, emphasizing slavery and colonization concerns, as well as moral elevation. Indicative of the depth of Mary's fervor over emancipation, one issue included stories addressing: "Slavery and the Capture of Washington City in 1814,"

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"Fugitive Slave from Western Pennsylvania," "From Liberia," "The African Slave Trade," "Secession and Emancipation," "Canadian Colonization," "Free Will Baptists and Slavery," and "Call for a Northern American Convention."[48]

However, the majority of the Aug. 27, 1851, issue was devoted equally to women and the topic of slavery. One item promoted a state convention for women in Wisconsin. Another described an event in Illinois in which women from Livingston County converged upon a 20-year-old woman who was rumored to have treated her 12-year-old slave cruelly. The group seized the woman, ". . . and after dragging her a considerable distance from her house, whipping her all the way, the merciful damsels covered her with a coat of tar and feathers. . . ."[49]

Often, the articles aimed at women readers were used to depict the harsh reality of the plight of women in North America. One item, "Women in India," contrasted the lives of North American women to the lives of those in India, where "in no other country of the world, perhaps, does woman hold a more painful and degraded position."[50]

The practice of leaving Mary in charge of the *Voice* while Henry travelled throughout the United States and Canada for speaking engagements and antislavery conventions became a common occurrence. During these frequent absences, Mary continued to advocate the causes she and Henry espoused throughout their lives, particularly education. One article commented on an item that appeared in the *Daily Appeal* in Memphis, Tenn., protesting the operation of a "Sabbath School" in which slaves were taught to read. The writer reasoned that educating even a few slaves to read the Bible was to result in the "most momentous consequences." The writer warned that the education process would not

stop at the Scriptures, but it would certainly lead to "a degree of literary education which will be found incompatible with the present happy security of the fabric of our social system."[51] Mary used the writer's remarks to illustrate the idea that education of the black race was the first step toward emancipation and acceptance into mainstream society. She remarked:

> A body of men premeditate keeping us in perpetual ignorance, because they *know* that if education reached us, we would understand when a sufficiency of labor had been performed for our employers, and also when it was time to commence working on our own account. In fact the truth would be elicited that we were human beings, and might compel the same acknowledgement from our masters. Let us hear no more of our natural inferiority, for the above sentences admit our equality with the white enslaver,--they establish the fact that slaves can be converted into thinking beings.[52]

She continued to advocate an end to slavery, while applauding the efforts of former slaves who had used subterfuge in order to escape from bondage. "Self Emancipation" detailed the adventures of a male slave who eluded his master in New Orleans and escaped to Canada in the guise of a female nursemaid called "Aunt Nancy."[53] In a similar item, "Woman wearing the Breeches," a young black woman arrived on the Canadian shore dressed in "her master's best jacket and trousers," passing him on the highway during her travels and failing to be recognized.[54]

By the end of the first year of operation, the *Voice* was beginning to experience the financial difficulties that plague most black newspapers during this period. Mary printed a series of pleas for financial support, in the form of donations, as well as subscription fees that had yet to be paid. In October 1851 the paper offered subscribers who paid four dollars, "with postage paid," five copies of each issue of the *Voice* for a year.[55] However, by December the *Voice*

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editors were appealing to their readers to pay up their subscriptions. They warned that they would "refrain from sending the Voice unless paid for in advance, as it is only by so doing, that we can be expected to maintain our ground."[56] On December 17, the editors declared that "dishonest" readers owed $300 in subscription fees. The editorial plea read:

> Our list of subscribers for the Voice of the Fugitive is now about eleven hundred and is on the increase; we should have nine hundred more in order to support a weekly. About $300 are due us on our subscription, which we very much need. All of the donations which we have received for the support of the paper during the present year, would not exceed $20, so the consequence has been, not only a year of our precious time lost, or given to the cause, but money out of pocket....[57]

However, lack of funding did not discourage the Bibbs, and despite sporadic funding, they continued to publish the *Voice*, moving the paper to Windsor in April 1852. Two months later, Henry hired James Theodore Holly as co-editor and co-proprietor, freeing Mary to operate her school and to pursue her community activities. Henry had hired Holly, formerly from Vermont, as a travelling agent and corresponding editor for "the New England and Middle States" regions when the paper had been moved in April. In the announcement of Holly's initial employment, Henry recommended him as an ally for Underground Railroad participants and for recently "self emancipated" ex-slaves who specifically sought refuge in Canada West or "the Island of Jamaica."[58] When Holly became co-editor and co-proprietor in June, the announcement praised Henry's decision to hire a partner, since his responsibilities of running the paper alone were extremely strenuous. The extent of Mary's contributions during the paper's period of operation was not mentioned. It read:

> Henry Bibb, of Windsor, C.W., who has been, during the last sixteen months, confined almost exclusively to the Editorial Chair of the Voice of the Fugitive, with a multiplicity of other duties and embarrassments, necessarily growing out of his position, in consequence of not having a co-laborer, would now respectfully announce to his personal friends, as well as to those who are interested in the elevation of the refugees in Canada, and the abolition of American slavery, that he has just succeeded in securing the aid and co-operation of J. Theodore Holly, Esq., of Vermont, who is in every way well qualified to take charge of the office, while he spends a few months in travelling through some of the nominally free States.[59]

The remainder of the item attempted to explain the necessity for Henry's extended absence from the paper, including expanding the *Voice*'s circulation by 2,000 new subscribers in order to raise money to increase its size and the frequency of publication from semimonthly to weekly.

Expansion plans may have been Henry's primary reason for seeking additional assistance from Holly, educated in Washington, D.C., and New York,[60] to operate the paper, or the need for a worker experienced in printing may have been the motivation behind the action. In the same issue announcing Holly's new position, an advertisement proclaimed that the Windsor printing office of Bibb and Holly was "now prepared to execute every description of work in their line with accuracy, neatness and despatch." They offered to print items such as books, pamphlets, circulars, and handbills "at Detroit Prices," and handbills could be "struck off in one hour's notice."[61]

The motivation for additional help at the newspaper might also have been because of Mary's constant ministrations to her dying mother. Appearing just above the advertisement for printing services, another item detailed the death of Mary Miles, the mother of Mary Bibb, "who was the idol of her heart, and who was with her until she had 'passed through the dark valley and shadow of death.'"[62] The obituary concluded

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that it had been the mother's "pride and glory to spend all the fruits of her labor for the education of this child, who wept around and soothed her dying bed."[63]

Whatever the reason, the *Voice* had acquired a new co-editor, and Mary returned to her activities of working with ex-slaves who had escaped to Canada. In January 1852 she had been selected as corresponding secretary for the Refugee Home Society, an organization established to operate a settlement for fugitive slaves in Canada West along the Detroit frontier border.[64] Historian and journalist Benjamin Drew later explained:

> Mr. Henry Bibb, who was himself a fugitive from the house of bondage, originated the idea of establishing a society which should 'aim to purchase thirty thousand acres of government land somewhere in the most suitable section of Canada where it can be obtained for the homeless refugees from American slavery to settle upon.' This was soon after the passage of the fugitive slave bill.[65]

Operation of the settlement in Windsor had fallen to the Bibbs, who were forced to use the columns of the *Voice* to defend the organization. The society was often criticized for its officers' begging tours for donations, as well as its land ownership restrictions and the patronizing attitudes of the officers toward the refugees.[66]

Despite receiving criticism over the RHS project, Mary continued her antislavery activities. On October 18, 1852, she joined other Windsor residents at "the Barracks" and formed the interracial Anti-Slavery Society of Windsor, a branch of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada. The ASW proposed "the promotion of right principles upon the subject of Slavery," in addition to working with similar organizations in distributing antislavery information and in advocating "greater zeal in religious bodies in regard to this momentous question."[67] However,

within two months of its founding, Mary Ann Shadd Cary began to dominate the society's activities, relieving Mary of much of her influence in society business.

Cary also become a formidable opponent for Mary in her educational endeavors. Little or no financial support from the government created major obstacles for the education system in Sandwich. Mary's private school foundered later in 1852, and she busied herself as a dressmaker until the spring of 1853 when she received a teacher's position with a government-sponsored school with 69 students.[68] The idea of government-sponsorship of a public school would spark a bitter debate between the two schoolteachers. Mary and Henry Bibb had earlier encouraged Cary to come to Windsor and establish a school. An item in the *Voice* on November 19, 1851, written by Mary, documented the activities during a donation party to raise money for a church and school, and in the article Mary praised Cary for her intellectual accomplishments and credited the large turnout to Cary's reputation for quality education.[69] However, the two clashed over the principles of a segregated school funded by the government. Mary supported the endeavor, while Cary opposed what she called "caste institutions," which she felt would only serve to promote racial discrimination and distrust between the races.[70] By the end of 1853, lack of government funds caused Mary to shut down her school,[71] and Cary, whose school also closed for lack of money, had started her own newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*.[72]

The *Voice* had undergone several changes, both positive and negative. Successful operation of the paper in 1852 prompted Henry to make plans for a larger, weekly paper in 1853 with a new name, *Voice of the Fugitive and Canadian Independent*.[73] However, the offices burned

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down in October 1853, and the paper suspended publication while Henry made plans to re-establish operations immediately.[74] However, Henry's illness supposedly of "brain fever" and subsequent death on August 1, 1854,[75] prevented the *Voice*'s revival.

Henry's death marked a turning point in Mary's life. The 34-year-old widow had lost not only a husband, but also a companion, and she was also burdened with the necessity of supporting herself. She moved to Windsor and established another private school. In 1855, historian Benjamin Drew noted the success of the school. He wrote:

> Mrs. Mary E. Bibb, widow of the late lamented Henry Bibb, Esq., has devoted herself to teaching a private school in Windsor, and with good success. During the last spring term, she had an attendance of forty-six pupils, seven of whom were white children.[76]

Mary was obviously surviving on the meagre pay that most teachers received during this time. However, the *Freeman* later reported that Mary presented a claim to the RHS for 200 acres of land, valued at $10,000, purchased by Henry and in the society's possession.[77] Mary was also accused of refusing to support her mother-in-law, Mildred Jackson, and allowing her to starve.[78] The article's publication indicates that Cary was not quite ready to solve her differences with Mary.

However, the two may have reached some form of truce after Mary married Isaac N. Cary, Mary Ann Shadd Cary's brother-in-law, during the period after 1855. He had settled in Canada in the mid-1850s after residing in Haiti for several years, in addition to running a barbershop in Washington, D.C. Shortly after his marriage to Mary Bibb, he agreed to work as an agent for his sister-in-law's Provincial Freeman, but that arrangement failed to survive his marriage to Mary and his obligations to the emigrationist cause. Isaac Cary seemed to be much like Henry

Bibb, sharing Mary's enthusiasm for moral and social causes. During William Wells Brown's tour of Canada West in 1861, he commented favorably on the activities of both Isaac and Mary. He reported:

> Mr. Cary is one of the most enterprising and intellectual men in Canada, and is deeply interested in the moral, social, and political elevation of all classes. Mrs. Cary, is better known as the beautiful and accomplished Mary E. Miles, afterward, Mrs. Henry Bibb. Her labors during the lifetime of Mr. Bibb, in connection with him, for the fugitives, and her exertions since, are too well known for me to make mention of them here. Mrs. Cary has a private school, with about 40 pupils, mostly children of the better class of the citizens of Windsor.[79]

Mary apparently continued to operate her school until the 1870s when she moved to Brooklyn, New York, where she spent the remainder of her life.[80] She died in 1877, obviously a wealthy woman. In her will, she included a provision for $3,000 to be distributed to various charitable organizations, including the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum in Brooklyn.[81]

While Mary Bibb Cary was given little credit for her activities for the *Voice*, she obviously had a significance influence over the role the newspaper played shaping the lives of black society in the United States and Canada. Promoting education as the cure for many of the problems plaguing the black race, she used her own education to speak out at a time when women were expected to remain silent. By so doing, she opened doors for blacks and women that forever have remained closed.

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ENDNOTES

[1]Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 62.

[2]*The Liberator*, 17 November 1832.

[3]V.P. Franklin, *Black Self-Determination, A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1984), 161.

[4]See, C. Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume II, Canada, 1830-1865* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 110; Afua Cooper, "The Search for Mary Bibb, Black Woman Teacher in Nineteenth-Century Canada West," *Ontario History* 83, no. 1 (March 1991): 40.

[5]Martin Robison Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (Philadelphia: By the Author, 1852), 132.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Wendell P. Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 103.

[8]Ripley, *Black Abolitionists Papers*, 110.

[9]Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists*, 130-134.

[10]Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (New York, NY: n.p., 1849), 190.

[11]Ibid, 190-191.

[12]Ibid, 191.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ripley, *Black Abolitionists Papers*, 110.

[15]Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel, 1951), 299.

[16]Fred Landon, "The Negro Migration to Canada after the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act," *Journal of Negro History* 5 (October 1920): 22-36.

[17]Mary Bibb to Gerrit Smith, November 8, 1850, Gerrit Smith Papers, George Arents Research Libray, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Reprinted in Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 108.

[18]Henry Bibb to the Executive Committee of the American Missionary Asociation, December 14, 1850, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. NOTE: Spelling and grammatical errors appear in the original letter.

[19]Bibb, *Narrative*, xi.

[20]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 January 1851.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 15 January 1851.

[24]Ibid, 26 February 1851.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists*, 67.

[27]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 26 February 1851.

[28]Daniel Hill, *Freedom Seekers*, 156.

[29]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 30 July 1851.

[30]Ibid, 2 July 1851.

[31]Ibid, 13 August 1851.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.

[34]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 7 May 1851.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid, 2 July 1851.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

[41]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 16 July 1851.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 2 July 1851.

[45]Ibid, 13 August 1851.

[46]Ibid, 27 August 1851.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid, 30 July 1851.

[49]Ibid, 27 August 1851.

[50]Ibid, 10 September 1851.

[51]Ibid, 22 October 1851.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid, 19 November 1851.

[55]Ibid, 8 October 1851.

[56]Ibid, 3 December 1851.

[57]Ibid, 17 December 1851.

[58]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 8 April 1852.

[59]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 17 June 1852.

[60]Ripley, *Black Abolitionists Papers*, 141.

[61]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 17 June 1852.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ripley, *Black Abolitionists Papers*, 147; *Voice of the Fugitive*, 12 February 1852.

[65]Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery, The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with An Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856), 324.

[66]Ibid.

[67]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 21 October 1852.

[68]Ripley, *Black Abolitionists Papers*, 110-111.

[69]Voice of the Fugitive, 19 November 1851.

[70]Details of the feud can be found in Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler, *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Ann Shadd Cary* (Toronto: N.C. Press, Ltd., 1977); and Jason Silverman, "Mary Ann Shadd and the Search for Equality," in Leon Litwack and August Meier (eds.), *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 87-100.

[71]Annual Report of the Local Superintendent of Common Schools, Township of Sandwich, 1853, Archives of Ontario.

[72]*Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

[73]*Voice of the Fugitive*, 16 December 1852.

[74]*The Liberator*, 28 October 1853.

[75]*Provincial Freeman*, 29 April 1854; Bearden and Butler, *Life and Times*, 150.

[76]Drew, *Narratives of Fugitive Slaves*, 321-322.

[77]*Provincial Freeman*, 25 November 1856.

[78]Bearden and Butler, *Life and Times*, 152.

[79]*Pine and Palm* (Boston, Mass.), 19 October 1861.

[80]Afua Cooper contends that Mary Bibb Cary may have closed her school as early as 1865 because Dun and Bradstreet business directories list Mary as operating a "fancy goods shop" from 1865 to 1871. See Cooper, "Search for Mary Bibb," 43.

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[81]Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 111.